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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000800

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA CROCKER, NEA/NGA AND EUR/SE;
NSC FOR KHALILZAD;
OSD FOR LUTI AND HRHODE;
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2013

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ: PUK'S BARHAM SALIH: WORRIES OF
TURKISH MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN NIRAQ, TROUBLE WITH ITF,
VIEWS ON TRILATS, KREKAR, ECON CRISIS

REF: ANKARA 278

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch. Reasons: 1.5 (B and D).

Summary

1. (S) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) "Prime Minister" Barham Salih briefed Operation Northern Watch POLAD in Ankara Jan. 29 and 31 on his recent travel in Europe and his Jan. 30 meetings with Turkish officials. Salih said his talks with Turks were mostly positive, with the exception of the Turkmen issue. Salih told the Turks he believed Turkey was making a "big mistake" by tying themselves only to the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). In the long run Turkey would need the support and friendship of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs more than the Turkmen, who would always support Turkey in any case. In addition, he told the Turks, the ITF was defining Turkmen rights on an anti-Kurd platform, an unhelpful and dangerous move that indicated the ITF's political immaturity. MFA Under Secretary Ziyal told Salih that Turkey would permit journalists to transit Turkey en route to the February opposition conference in northern Iraq. Finally, echoing what Kurdistan Democratic Party leader Barzani told us January 9 (reftel), Salih objected to Turkish troops participating in military operations in northern Iraq unless under US command, and even then, he was uncomfortable with the notion. "They are looking for a mission. We don't want to be their mission." Salih said he hoped PUK leader Jalal Talabani could discuss this bilaterally with Amb. Khalilzad in Ankara on Feb. 6. Salih also raised the release of Ansar al-Islam leader Mullah Krekar and the PUK's current economic crisis. End Summary.

PUK Raises Turkmen Problems with GOT

2. (S) PUK "PM" Barham Salih briefed ONW POLAD January 29 and 31 on his travel to Europe and his Jan. 30 meetings with Turkish MFA, TGS and TNIO officials. He characterized his meetings with Turks as good, with one problematic issue: the Iraqi Turkmen. Salih told the Turks they needed to cultivate friendships with the Iraqi Arabs and Kurds, and that Turkey's limited focus on Iraqi Turkmen was alienating other Iraqis. "People in Iraq are exasperated with the Turks" he told us. "We know they are one of the keys to our future and provide a good example of secular democracy, but Turkish support of the ITF and discussion of Turkish military involvement in Iraq are creating many complications." Calling the ITF politically immature, Salih complained that ITF leaders are defining Turkmen rights on an anti-Kurd platform, which was ultimately dangerous, given Turkey's support for the ITF and plans for military presence in northern Iraq. Salih said the KDP, PUK and other Iraqi opposition groups should give Turkey assurances on everything they want, including on Kirkuk, to avoid Turkish military involvement.

Salih Opposes TGS Involvement in Iraq

3. (S) Salih asked us if Turks in northern Iraq would be under US military command. When we told him we could not answer that question at this stage and urged him and/or Talabani to raise the matter with Presidential Special Envoy

Khalilzad during the latter's visit here Feb. 5-6, Salih replied that he had consistently told US officials that he and the PUK would be concerned about any increased Turkish military presence in northern Iraq. "They have no business there." Such a presence could only be acceptable under US command, and even that made the Iraqi Kurds uncomfortable. Repeating some themes raised with us by KDP leader Barzani reftel, Salih said if the Turkish military comes into northern Iraq, they will never leave. Their presence will draw in the Iranians, he said. They will try to force the undemocratic ITF down the Kurds' throats and restrict Iraqi Kurds' political aspirations. In short, he said, the Turkish military "is looking for a mission. We do not want to be their mission."

Views on US-Turkey-Iraqi Kurds Talks

14. (S) When we discussed the Feb. 5-6 multi-party talks to be led on the US side by PSE Khalilzad, Salih said the Iraqi Kurds were interested in talking with the Turks about what happens during military operations, but not about what post-Saddam Iraq would look like. He said if the Turks think they have a say in that discussion they will think they can "run" northern Iraq. "That discussion is for Iraqis, not foreigners." He was very firm on the point and said that the Turks want the Iraqi Kurds to be Iraqis first. But when they behave like Iraqis and try to discuss Iraq's future, Turkey identifies them as Kurds and insists on inserting itself in a discussion where Turkey does not belong. Turkey, he said, cannot have it both ways on this point. Salih said that including the ITF - even as observers - in the multi-party talks will complicate things and could degenerate into KDP-ITF bickering. But more seriously, inclusion of the ITF would give the Turks baseless claims to insist on getting their way on every point "to protect the interests of the Turkmen." That said, he realized we may need to find a way to check the ITF box in order to keep the Turks in the talks, but he was decidedly unenthusiastic.

Turks: Conference Invite Should Come From KDP/PUK/ITF

15. (S) Turning to the upcoming Iraqi opposition conference, Salih said MFA U/S Ziyal told him Turkey would permit journalists to attend via Turkey. Salih invited Ziyal to send a GOT rep to the conference. Ziyal said he would consider the invitation. TGS, Salih said, pushed him to have the invitation to the conference jointly issued and signed by KDP leader Barzani, PUK leader Talabani and ITF leader Sanan Aga. Salih told us the PUK was considering having the invitation issued by all the opposition groups based in Iraq to avoid a problem over this. He said that including the ITF in all the Advisory Committee sub-groups should not be a problem. "It is in our interest to have the ITF in all of the opposition work, but not to have them shoved down our throats by outsiders." He noted that ITF leader Aga had in the past supported autonomy for the region of "Iraqi Kurdistan" and had even served on the region's autonomous legislative council before the Gulf War. That he now was opposed to autonomy for the region was an interesting indicator of his own lack of autonomy.

Readout from Davos - Surprising Support

16. (S) Salih said that the Iraqi opposition delegation at Davos, in which he participated, got a great hearing and spoke to a large and surprisingly supportive crowd. He complained that the European governments are "useless" on Iraq. He said that KDP/PUK cooperation was excellent and that there was no way the parties would return to confrontation with each other during hostilities. "Those who suggest so are hoping we will, but we're all playing this smart." The KDP and the PUK finally opened liaison offices in each other's territory last week, fulfilling a Washington Agreement reconciliation requirement.

Mullah Krekar - Offer of Additional Info

17. (S) Salih asked us why the Dutch had released Ansar al-Islam leader Mullah Krekar and why the US had not tried to extradite him. Salih suggested Krekar had al-Qaeda

connections that should be sufficient for the US to hold him.
Salih offered to provide any info necessary to help get him
in appropriate custody and said that Krekar and his relatives
are desparately looking for a way to get Krekar back to
Biyara.

PUK Econ Crisis - Appeal for Currency Assistance

18. (C) Finally, Salih said that the PUK regional
administration was in urgent need of economic assistance, was
grateful for what it had already received, but was now unable
to pay for public services and had a major currency crisis.
He said they could in theory go to a mostly USD-based economy
(many salaries are already paid in dollars), but they had
virtually no small denomination bills which made it
impossible to use the USD for daily commerce. He asked if we
could help infuse into the region small USD bills. He also
said the UK is holding a large amount of frozen Iraqi
accounts in old dinars and wondered whether there was any
chance of getting those released into circulation. He said
he would follow up on this matter by phone with appropriate
USG officials.
PEARSON